

AISES PEOPLE

LEADERSHIP IN THE WORLD OF SCIENCE AND BEYOND

Being home — or at least close to home — is important to Alex Goldtooth. It's one of the determining factors that landed him at Arizona State University, and it was one of the reasons Goldtooth decided to pursue a degree in electrical engineering.

“My first choice was the University of Kansas, but my parents talked me out of it because it was too far away from them — and home,” he says. “My second choice was the University of Arizona, and my third choice was to go to Northern Arizona University like my parents, but again my parents talked me out of going.” At just an hour's drive away, NAU was deemed too close. “They said I would be going home every chance I got,” says Goldtooth. “So I chose Arizona State University because it isn't too far and Phoenix has a lot to offer.”

Goldtooth, now a junior, started at Arizona State with plans to major in computer science engineering. But those classes were not what he expected. “I couldn't understand everything they were doing,” he remembers. “I had to sit there all day long just to write the code, and codes are three or four pages long.” A digital design class that was also for electrical engineering students helped Goldtooth choose a degree path that was a better fit for his talents. “I understood everything in that class,” he says.

And there was another reason to change majors. “Working in computer science, I would have to live in the city,” he says. “Through electrical engineering, I could find a lot more work opportunities on the reservation, and I like to be around there.”

Goldtooth grew up in Tuba City, Ariz., the youngest of four — and the only boy. Both his parents earned their bachelor's and master's degrees



ALEX GOLDTOOTH

NAVAJO / ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY / ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

Alex Goldtooth (Continued from page 9) at Northern Arizona University and both work in education. His sisters either have their degrees or are working on them, and they always set high standards for Goldtooth, encouraging him to work hard and graduate. Since education runs in the family, it was pretty important that Goldtooth attend college. “It was either that or work,” he says. “If I went to work, I would be on my own.”

But at college, he’s not alone. Goldtooth has been a member of AISES since his freshman year. He says being part of the organization has helped him pay for tuition, living expenses, and “most importantly, food.” Grants and three scholarships — a Navajo Nation scholarship, a Navajo Nation Chapter House Scholarship, and a scholarship from National Relief Charities — help cover school fees.

The National Relief Charities scholarship for American Indian students contributed \$2,000 toward his freshman year expenses and \$4,000 this school year. “That one helped me a lot with tuition and books,” he said. “Without it I would probably be working more hours.” Goldtooth works at a sandwich shop when he is not attending school, doing homework, or playing basketball.

For Goldtooth, the hardest part of getting through college is working and going to school full time. But he says his good work ethic is carrying him through. Well, that and his family. “My aunt always told me if getting a degree was easy, everyone could do it. But it’s not, so you can be one of the few that actually do do it,” he says. “It’s going to be hard but it’s a matter of pushing yourself and doing what you have to do — not what you want to do — and pushing forward for your education.”

— Rivkela Brodsky

For more information on scholarships provided by the National Relief Charities American Indian Education Foundation, visit nrcprograms.org.



SASHA HARDY

NAVAJO / STANFORD UNIVERSITY / EARTH SYSTEMS

Randella Sasha Hardy took a chance when she decided to leave the familiarity of Magdalena, N.M., to attend Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif. Originally from Phoenix, her family moved to Magdalena when Hardy was entering the sixth grade, and she found the small, remote town with its mountains and dirt roads a welcome change from the crowds of the city.

Her class at Magdalena High School had fewer than 30 students, and there weren’t many AP and college prep classes available. Still, Hardy was determined to challenge herself and pursue an education out of state, so she reached out to her counselor and teachers who helped her identify universities that fit her personal preferences.

Like many students, she started college enrolled in a program she had chosen because of a general interest — hers in the health of the environment. At Stanford she discovered that she had