

Diversity Champion Spotlight: Kevin Gibson, Botany and Plant Pathology

Kevin Gibson is a Professor in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology. He joined the College of Agriculture in 2002.

For the last nine years, Kevin has worked with a group of faculty and staff from the College of Agriculture as well as other colleges to increase the number of Native American graduate students at Purdue. He has served as co-PI, and now as PI, on a series of grants from the Sloan Foundation that have been used to recruit Native American students into STEM graduate programs at Purdue and at six other universities. A total of 44 students have been recruited to Purdue to date, 14 of them into the College of Agriculture. The retention and graduation rate for these students is above 90%, significantly higher than the overall graduation rate for graduate students across the university. He is the lead PI for the national Sloan Indigenous Graduate Program (SIGP), which currently has nearly 100 Native students. Purdue's program is the only SIGP located east of the Mississippi.



Kevin has mentored two of these students, Raelynn Butler and Melinda Adams, in his own research program. After completing her MS degree, Melinda returned to Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches environmental sciences. Raelynn completed an MS degree and is now a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer at Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

Kevin is actively involved in recruiting students from tribal colleges and universities to come to Purdue. He spends a great deal of time establishing relationships, building trust and connecting with students and professors. Once these students arrive at Purdue, Kevin meets with them weekly in a class focused on professional development and navigating the challenges of graduate school. He has been a strong advocate for this program and very effective in his interactions with administrators to identify additional sources of funding for Native American graduate students.

Without Kevin's commitment and dedication to this effort, the university and the College of Agriculture would not have experienced the impact of these Native American students on campus, and these students may not have been able to continue their education that has opened new opportunities for them.