

# 2021 MRC Outstanding Senior Timothy E. Benally



**The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) is honored to introduce our 2021 MRC Outstanding Senior: Timothy E. Benally.** This recognition is given to a senior who has been an active contributor to the MRC mission, while exemplifying leadership, academic achievement, persistence, community service, and passion for social justice.

Tim will be graduating this May with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Life Sciences option. Recently, Tim was appointed Public Information Officer for the Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker and will be serving the Navajo Nation government, while completing a hometown fellowship with Lead for America and conducting a project. He plans to pursue a doctoral degree in Community Development or Psychology.

*Throughout the pandemic I have been so impressed with Tim's persistence, perseverance, and his positive attitude....Tim opted for remote learning and decided to take on a part-time job to help serve his [Navajo] community, to provide leadership, and to meet various needs.*

~Curtis Price, Director of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program

*Tim is an inspiring student leader, who has not only relentlessly served his community and supported the equity work of all students of color at Penn State, but has modeled academic excellence while doing so.*

~Melissa Landrau Vega, MRC Director

*[Tim] has proven himself to be a competent and committed scholar who is dedicated to giving back to his community and doing whatever he can to help improve the health and well-being of the Native Americans. He approaches his education and development as a citizen of the world with humility and openness.... [and] has been truly impressive in his scholarship, but also in [his] humanity, his spirit, and his perseverance.*

~Dr. José Soto, Associate Professor of Psychology

*"Tim arrived at PSU with a plan and executed it masterfully.... His contributions to the university will leave a lasting impact."*

~Alex Kenney, MRC counselor

*The beautiful thing is that no matter what phase of his journey he was on, [Tim] prioritized service and leadership every step of the way; continuously uplifting those around him and serving as a tremendous source of encouragement.*

~Dr. Nontalie Morrow, Former MRC graduate assistant

*While being part of the MRC Leadership Council, Tim expressed his passion to create transformational change [in] the Penn State community by building a platform of justice for Native Americans while being an ally for many communities of color.... His passion drives him towards the goal of doing better and being a catalyst of change.*

~Lee Juarez, Former MRC graduate assistant

*Tim constantly shows up as his authentic self in all spaces. His unapologetic energy, especially as it relates to social justice issues, is a powerful and necessary force.... The goal of true liberation is something he takes personally, and I am forever rooting for his needs as he elevates.*

~Nkenji Clarke, MRC graduate assistant and SLC coordinator

*What is most inspiring about Timothy Benally is that besides all of his volunteerism and leadership responsibilities, when you sit with him, he is 100% present and focused, as if he has all the time in the world to spend with you.... He cares so deeply, takes action for change and is an outstanding scholar.*

~Diane Farnsworth, MRC Assistant Director

# About Tim E. Benally...

Tim arrived at Penn State in the fall of 2017 from the community of Ganado, Arizona, Navajo Nation. During the last three years, Tim has been a member of the MRC Student Leadership Council (SLC), where he has shined for his leadership and contributions. Tim has also participated in two MRC affinity groups, Blends of Traditional Heritages and Black and Latino Male Empowerment Group.

Tim's contributions to Penn State have been great, as he has tirelessly worked to recognize, uplift, and celebrate the Indigenous community at Penn State. He has worked with the University to recruit and support the needs of Indigenous students and to advocate for initiatives that serve the interests of this community, including helping develop a University Land Acknowledgment, to recognize Indigenous Peoples as stewards of the lands in which Penn State is built. Most recently, he founded and became the first president of the Indigenous Peoples Student Association. Tim has also been a Penn State resident assistant, a DUS leadership council member, and a World in Conversation dialogue facilitator, among many other roles, and worked for the Penn State Upward Bound Program and the Blue Band.

Tim explains that navigating Penn State alone was challenging, especially when it came to "feelings of imposter syndrome and survivor's guilt, coming from a rural community." The pandemic presented additional challenges for Tim, as COVID-19 has adversely and disproportionately impacted the Navajo Nation, he has lost two family members to the virus, and he has battled the virus and major complications, himself. Despite the challenges he has faced, however, Tim has met his academic responsibilities and has excelled academically, landing in the Dean's List for five semesters.

As a Ronald E. McNair scholar, Tim conducted two undergraduate research projects under the supervision and guidance of Dr. José Soto, Associate Professor of Psychology at Penn State. Tim's research, *Empathy Engagement with Native Americans in the Context of Social Disparities and Historical Trauma*, was published in the National McNair Scholar Journal (2019) and was presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual McNair Research Conference and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Pre-Conference, in 2019.

Tim credits God for guiding his life and the "people [in] the MRC, [his] church, the McNair Scholar Program, and professors who are now like family to [him] such as Drs. Victoria and John Sanchez and Dr. Soto, [for sharing with him] wisdom and guidance to keep persevering." He also thanks his fiancé, Sarah, for supporting him and helping him "balance a crazy job-school-volunteer life with a cheerful heart."

## He would like to offer MRC students the following advice:

***Remember that you are here for a reason and have innate worth no matter who you are. I think it is easy to see thousands of people in a day...and wonder how much you matter (I know I did). But know...that you DO; and not only that, but you have the opportunity to make a difference on this campus. The MRC helped me with this tremendously. [K]now whether you come from the middle of nowhere [in] Arizona, or "just outside of Philly," you are an expert of something - whether it be surviving a pandemic or your favorite subject. Use that to build, teach, and give back.... With that, be safe during these difficult times, look out for each other, and know God loves you. Stay blessed!***

Tim's accomplishments at Penn State are countless. With his journey and accomplishments, Tim aims to "show the world that the Navajo are still here and [that] any Native American kid can thrive at home or afar." His work has laid the ground for much needed equity work at Penn State. Every faculty and staff who commented on Tim's accomplishments noted that it was a privilege to have been part of his journey at Penn State. His passion, advocacy, persistence, and scholarship have unquestionably made him an **Outstanding Senior**. We cannot wait to see what is next for you, Tim! Ahéhee'!