

MentorSTEP

Supporting Indigenous Women in STEM

MentorSTEP was a two-year pilot project designed to support Saskatchewan Indigenous women to pursue STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Math) and related careers that support Saskatchewan's mining industry. MentorSTEP student participants included both high school students from within the Saskatoon Tribal Council, and students at the University of Saskatchewan. Student participants were supported via both mentorship relationships and internship positions.

MentorSTEP embedded the Indigenous worldview in their circle-mentorship model where mentorship is equal and shared among more than two people, with each participant bringing learning and teaching into the relationship. Mentorship circles were created with two students (one high-school, one university) and up to three mentors from university and industry. This brought a sense of listening and learning to better understand issues facing Indigenous women interested in pursuing STEM careers and eventually enter the mining industry.

The project was greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. In-person events were halted, and this impacted the ability to continue the mentorship circles. Unequal and inadequate access to Wi-Fi and technology also impacted the ability to move the activity online, resulting in the mentorship component being discontinued.

MentorStep was able to continue with the internships with seven awarded in 2020 and nine in 2021. The internship component of MentorSTEP, along with the IMII iMpowered scholarship calls, highlighted some gaps that have a particular impact on Indigenous students. In searching for, identifying, and succeeding in chosen career paths, students need a high measure of not only technical skills, but professional skills: high self-worth, ability to self-advocate, communication, confidence, and determination. To address these gaps, both summer 2020 and summer 2021 students were supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research at USask to engage in additional training and events via the SURE: Student Undergraduate Research Experience program which promotes increased communication, management, and professional/ entrepreneurial development skills. In addition, the summer 2021 MentorSTEP interns had extra opportunities for connection with the USask Mitacs Indigenous Research Assistantship (INDRA) pilot program, including the highly successful Tea with Aunties and Uncles to discuss their summer internship work. These first steps would be better supported within a larger, holistic, and integrated program for Indigenous students to gain the skills needed to define, target, and achieve success.



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Highlights and Achievements:

- 7 high schools, 16 university students, 33 mentors inclusive of 8 university and 5 industry supervisors for interns, and 11 high school contacts/supporters/drivers participated in the project.
- 16 summer internships were placed.
- MentorSTEP became an example to support the creation of another Indigenous high school mentorship program at USask, [BIRM: Building Intercultural Resilience Mentorship Program](#), led by the Office of the Vice Provost Indigenous Engagement, which connects Saskatoon Indigenous high school students to USask Indigenous students through shared experiences, leadership events, and skill development.
- MentorSTEP led directly to Mitacs awarding the University of Saskatchewan four of its pilot MitacsINDRA.
- The MentorSTEP summer internship program grew year over year, particularly with Saskatchewan's mining industry, to the point where mining companies requested and planned summer 2022 Indigenous internships.
- Through a holistic lens that considers both STEM+ training and internships, MentorSTEP's successes and results indicate that restructuring support for Indigenous students in STEM in Saskatchewan will lead to a larger, more confident, and resilient group of students ready to make a difference in Saskatchewan's mining industry.
- On February 11, 2021, Carolyn Bennett, at the time Minister of Crown Indigenous Relations, tweeted out in support of International Day of Women and Girls in Science, and pointed specifically at the MentorSTEP program at the University of Saskatchewan.
- MentorSTEP successfully profiled three of the student interns, two of whom completed at least two internships.
 - [A World of Difference: Shining a Light on Indigenous Women in Science – profile of student Julia Doucette-Garr at the Canadian Light Source](#)
 - [Embracing my Background: MentorSTEP chat with Samantha Moore](#)
 - [Stay Deadly: Sydney Kuppenbender](#)

[MentorSTEP - Office of the Vice President Research - Research - University of Saskatchewan \(usask.ca\)](#)

Proponent:	University of Saskatchewan
Project Duration:	October 2019 to September 2021
Project Cost:	\$192,996
IMII:	\$118,030
University of Saskatchewan:	\$ 32,966
Saskatoon Tribal Council:	\$ 40,000
Other:	\$ 2,000



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