

# Student Experiential Learning in the Natural Resources



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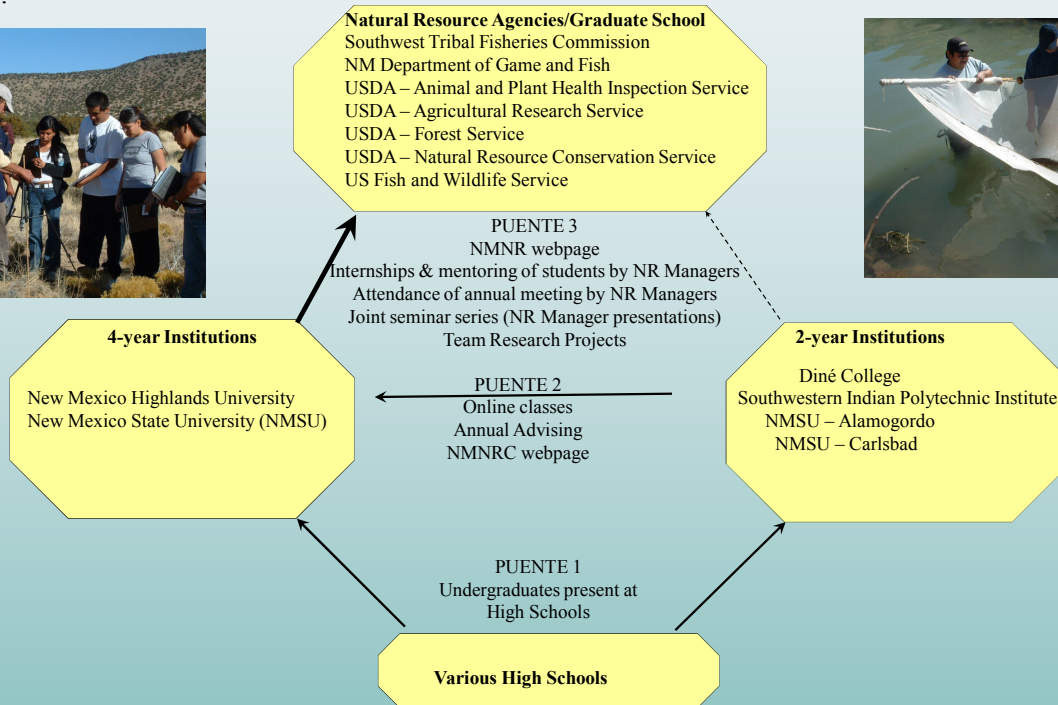
## Introduction

Student enrollment in Natural Resource disciplines is declining nationwide while vacancies in resource agencies are projected to increase sharply due to employee retirements. This leaves employers struggling to replace their workforce with qualified and diverse individuals. To address this national need, institutions across New Mexico are working collaboratively to form the New Mexico Natural Resources Consortium (NMNRC). The NMNRC consists of High Schools, 2- and 4-year institutions, tribal, non-governmental and government agencies across the state (Fig. 1).

## Approach

In this project we

- (1) place qualified and motivated students from six core New Mexico institutions and affiliated institutions on internships with mentors from Natural Resource Agencies,
- (2) provide undergraduate student teams (4-7 students) with research projects, and
- (3) provide students with international internship and exchange opportunities.



**Figure 1:** Strategies to recruit students from High Schools via a Program Unifying Environmental and Natural Resources Targeting Excellence (PUENTE 1), encourage students to pursue a 4-year degree (PUENTE 2) and retain students and recruit them into the Natural Resource (NR) Agencies or graduate school by informing them about job opportunities and acquainting them with role models (PUENTE 3). Other institutions that want to join later can do so via Undergraduate Natural Resource Initiatives Through Educational Development (UNITED).

## Combining Scholarship, Teaching, Recruitment

Scholarship is provided through internships and research project, potentially increasing retention. Undergraduates participating in the program present their internship or research experiences at local High Schools acting as a recruitment tool. This project aims to increase the recruitment and retention of students in Natural Resource disciplines, encourage students at 2-year institutions to pursue a 4-year degree program, improve student academic performance and through experiential learning opportunities and help students make a stronger connection between their education and future careers.

### 2009:

# of students employed	males/females	Hispanic/Native American	High School Students	Presentations given	# of High School students listening to presentation
24	15/9	7/2	1	12	≈ 258

**2010:** increased number of High School students and international experiences