Marcos Moreno '17 spent the summer of 2014 working on a public health project in his home community, his tribe’s reservation in southern Arizona. In what he calls an “emotional and very rewarding experience,” Moreno worked with community members to examine the quality of life and the health care system on the Pascua Yaqui reservation. The project, he says, cemented his lifelong goal to return home after school and work in medicine.

“I promised people I would be there for a long time,” says Moreno, a human development major who is pre-med with a concentration in neurobiology.

This spring, Moreno received the Udall Scholarship, awarded to those excelling in the fields of tribal policy, health care, or conservation; it is named for Congressman Morris Udall (1922-98), who helped the Pascua Yaqui tribe become federally recognized in 1978. As one of 60 scholars chosen from nearly 500 applicants nationwide, Moreno received $7,000 for his education.

A transfer student from St. John’s University, Moreno said he found support in Cornell’s American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) program. At first, he planned to create a tutoring program for indigenous communities near campus before learning that such opportunities for students of the Onondaga Nation already exist. Since then, he has been tutoring students at Lafayette Junior and Senior High School each week.

“He’s our crown jewel for the tutoring program, and the young guys there really look up to him in a lot of ways,” says Ansley Jemison, the resident hall director for Akwe:ikon, the North Campus program house that honors American Indian heritage.

Moreno says his interest in tutoring came from his primary schooling, where he attended classes near his tribe’s reservation.

There, he says, University of Arizona students mentored him and made him realize that he could one day attend college. He now serves as a First in Class Mobilizer in the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives, where he supports first-generation Cornell students as they acclimate to college life.

As an Akwe:ikon resident advisor, Moreno helps plan community events and serves as a mentor for the house’s 35 residents. Jemison, who nominated Moreno for the Udall award, says Moreno is a “self-made man in a lot of ways.”

“When it comes to Cornell and an Ivy League institution, he’s right up there with the best in the country. He takes a challenging course load. He keeps himself very active. He’s willing to sacrifice his own time to mentor young people. Those are qualities you don’t get with a lot of students,” Jemison says.

As a student researcher, Moreno works alongside Gary Evans, the Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor in the Departments of Design and Environmental Analysis and of Human Development, and Alexander Ophir, assistant professor of psychology in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Evans, whose research focuses on chronic poverty’s effects on human development across the lifespan, says Moreno is “tenacious in solving problems.”

For his success inside and outside the classroom, Moreno credits a strong student support system in the College of Human Ecology. As a senior, he intends to continue his lab research and volunteer work with the Onondaga Nation. “Service,” he says, “is about helping the next person in line.”

—Tyler Alicea '16, MPS '17