**University of Illinois’ National Center for Rural Health Professions Announces Plans for a Native American Pathway Program**

The National Center for Rural Health Professions (NCRHP), University of Illinois at Rockford is pleased to announce the hiring of Jenna Vater, a Native American Health Educator who will help implement the Native American (NA) Pathway Program. The NA Pathway Program plans to identify, recruit, enroll, graduate and retain Native American students to pursue a career in primary care medicine who will return to their communities to practice.

The NA Pathway Program is an outgrowth of NCRHP’s collaboration with the W.K. Kellogg Foundations’ Rural People, Rural Policy Initiative. The program was developed to promote health careers opportunities for Native Americans which will ultimately provide both access to and quality care for rural Native American people and communities.

Rural areas struggle to retain qualified medical professionals, especially primary care physicians. While the number of students from minority populations entering U.S. medical schools has increased over the past three decades, the small number of Native Americans has not gone up. Building on NCRHP’s Rural Medical Education (RMED) Program’s grow-your-own model, Native American students will be recruited from their communities with the intent of returning to practice in their community upon finishing school. Dr. Michael Glasser, Associate Dean, Dr. George & Mrs. Mildred Mitchell Professor of Rural and Family Medicine, National Center for Rural Health Professions, had this to say, “The NA Pathway Program presents unique challenges. Having Jenna on the Rockford campus is an essential step in linking the rural health professions program with Native American tribes and communities throughout the country.”

Ms. Vater has a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences in Public History and American Indian studies from the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire and a Master of Arts in Native American Studies from Montana State University. She is responsible for identifying, recruiting, and supporting Native American students interested in a medical or other health professions degree. Her main responsibilities include recruitment of Native American students, curriculum development with an emphasis on community-based and culturally appropriate educational programs, and advising, mentoring, and social support for Native American students.