

# Scientist of the Month



## Robin Masterman

Robin Masterman is a fourth-year BLaST Scholar and a senior in UAF's Biological Sciences BS program. Her mother is from Togiak, Alaska and her father is from Maine. Masterman plans to apply to medical school and return to Alaska to practice as a family physician in rural communities. She holds leadership positions in Inu-Yupiaq, a student-led Alaska Native dance group, the UAF Beading club, and in the Pre-Medical Society (AMSA) club. Her hobbies are beading, fur skin-sewing, traditional dancing, speaking Yup'ik, and cooking.

## Research

Masterman is currently engaged in three research projects. In the NIH-funded Center for Transformative Research in Metabolism (TRiM) project (<https://trimalaska.com/>), Early in Masterman's research, she assisted in the rat instrumentation surgery to help translate hibernation for space torpor and remote emergency medicine. Her second project looks at the benefits and drawbacks to using traditional healing in the treatment of behavioral health issues. This opportunity allows Masterman to work with a predominantly Alaska Native team, where the results will inform White House decisions related to Indian

Health Services. Masterman also recently joined a 5-year project, titled Neqkiuryaraq (or The Art of Preparing Food), an NIH's ComPASS initiative led by the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) in collaboration with UAF's Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR), Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), and the Bethel Community Services Foundation. This community- and elder-driven project will implement and evaluate structural interventions that support food sovereignty and security in the YK-Delta where she will serve as the project manager. Masterman's research journey includes attending conferences and training as part of her professional development. She attended the 2022 Experimental Biology Conference to learn how others presented their research and expand her network of fellow scholars. Masterman attended several workshops and programs such as Calricaraq, a YKHC Indian Health Services Healthy Families program (Feb. 2024), a Cross-Cultural Medicine Workshop held by the Association of American Indian Physicians (April 2023), the Native American Pathways Program (NAPP) Introduction to Health Careers six-week workshop hosted by the Mayo Clinic (July to August 2023), and the Alaska Indigenous Research Leadership Program run by ANTHC and Alaska Pacific University (May 2023). Masterman also worked in the health field at the Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital in Utqiagvik, Alaska during the summers of 2022 and 2023 as a patient healthcare technician.

## Mentoring

Masterman has been mentored by Dr. Kelly Drew, UAF Research Assistant Professor of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, under the TRiM research project, and lab technician Hoshi Sugiura. Sugiura shared, "Robin has played an essential part of the Drew lab research and we are fortunate to have her in our team. I cannot thank her enough for spending long hours of research with me." Dr. Andrea Bersamin, professor of Biology and Wildlife and faculty research at CANHR, shared, "Robin is well-positioned to be a leader in discussions and practice related to Alaska Native health equity and I'm so pleased to have had the opportunity to be one of her academic advisors and instructors and most recently on the Neqkiuryaraq project." Masterman was also previously mentored by Dr. Diane O'Brien, UAF full professor and now interim director of the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology. Masterman thanks her mentors, "I would like to thank Hoshi for being such an amazing and patient mentor in the Drew lab, Dr. Bersamin for believing in me and inspiring so much confidence, and my BLaST mentors Nikola Nikolic, Emily Sousa, and Ellen Chenoweth, my BLaST Research Advising and Mentoring Professionals (RAMPS), for helping me reach my goals not only as a student but as a person!"



**Top left:** BLaST Scholar Robin Masterman in the BLaST Student Engagement Center, April 2024. PC: Amy Topkok.

**Above left:** Masterman with her mentor Hoshi Sugiura. PC: Amy Topkok.

**Above right:** Masterman at the 2022 Experimental Biology Conference, Philadelphia, PA.