



NORTH DAKOTA

**ASPIRE
PRESENTS**

ND - SD CO -

STATE

GOLDEN PRAIRIES,

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Bismarck, North Dakota

University of Mary

March 30th-April 1st

2026

WELCOME TO ASPIRE CO STATE 2026



Welcome to the University of Mary

Nadine Butts
Chair: Conference
Committee

We want to welcome you to the University of Mary, North Dakota's premier Catholic university. Here at U-Mary we value higher education and how it impacts the lives of our students. Faith plays an important role in everything we do here, it provides the structure through which we give our students the opportunity for equity, inclusion, and access to the highest quality of education. U Mary has a big school feel wrapped around a small school package. Welcome to our campus



Andrew Larson

President of North Dakota ASPIRE

I would like to thank you for coming to Bismarck North Dakota to be with us. On behalf of the board and all of the members of North Dakota ASPIRE I would like to welcome you to Bismarck, and the University of Mary.

We have a great couple of days of speakers, and fellowship with one another planned.

I hope you have some time to enjoy Bismarck and its various amenities, restaurants, and local points of interest.

I would also like to take a moment to thank Nadine Butts of U-Mary, and the rest of the U Mary staff for doing the heavy lifting in the planning of this conference.

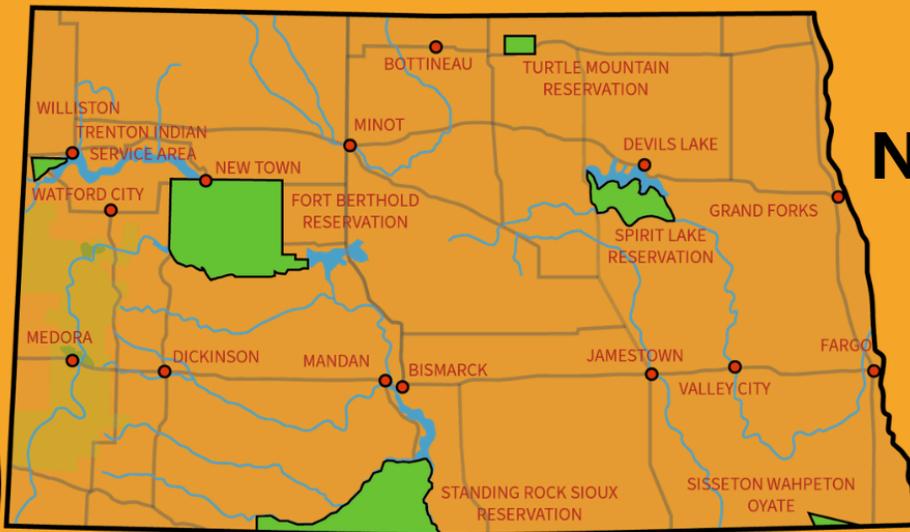
Another Special thanks to the members of the ND ASPIRE board, SD President Carol Voss-Ward, and all of our presenters for helping us put on the best conference we were able to.



Land Acknowledgement

Today, North Dakota ASPIRE rests on the ancestral lands of the original inhabitants of the Upper Great Plains.

We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Native American people still permeates this land. As a TRIO community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations peoples of the North and South Dakota. We also acknowledge the historical wrongs that the state, local, and national governments have perpetrated upon the Native American communities.



North Dakota Native American Communities

South Dakota Native American Communities



Schedule of Events



Monday March 30th

2 pm- 4 pm

6 pm- 9 pm

Self Guided Tour of North Dakota Heritage Center and Museum

Social at Laughing Sun Brewery

Sponsored By 

Tuesday March 31st

7 am - 8:30 am

8:30-9:00 am

10:00-10:30 am 9 am - 10 am

10:30-11:30

11:30-1:00 pm

1:00-2:00 pm

2:00-3:00 pm

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

4 pm

5 pm

Breakfast on your own

Welcome

Dr. James Link *U Mary*

Announcements, Open Silent Auction and 50/50

Dr. Russ McDonald *United Tribes*

TRIO Achiever's Luncheon

Dr. Diane Fladeland *U Mary*

Tom Schmidt *Bismarck Community HS*

State Meetings

Adjourn For Excursions

Supper on your Own

Wednesday April 1st

8:30 am - 9:15 am

10:00 am - 11:00 am

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

12:00 pm - 12:30 pm

12:30 pm

Breakfast in UMary

TRIO Offices

Tour of U Mary Campus

Dr. Kristi Bitz *U Mary*

Close of Conference

State Meeting II



Keynote Speaker

Dr. Russ McDonald PhD.

President of United Tribes
Technical College

2004 National TRIO Achiever
Award Winner



Dr. Leander R. McDonald, PhD, is an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation and a proud descendant of the Sahnish, Hidatsa, and Hunkpapa Nations. He currently serves as President of United Tribes Technical College (UTTC), where he champions Native higher education, tribal sovereignty, and community empowerment.

A graduate of a tribal college and university, Dr. McDonald has worked in Native higher education since 1998. His previous roles include Chairman of the Spirit Lake Nation, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Cankdeska Cikana Community College, and Assistant Professor at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, where he worked at the National Resource Center on Native American Aging.

His research has focused on health disparities among Native elders, healthcare access for American Indian veterans, and behavioral health risk factors in tribal communities. As tribal chairman, he provided congressional testimony on issues such as child protection legislation, tribal disparities, and equitable funding for Native programs, and served as the Great Plains Area Vice President for National Congress of American Indians.

Dr. McDonald is a U.S. Army veteran and a dedicated advocate for Native voices in policy, education, and health. He resides in Bismarck, North Dakota, with his wife, Francine.

Meet your North Dakota ASPIRE Board



Andy Larson

President
UND SSS



**Ruth
Gripentrog**

Secretary (Interim)
UND Talent Search



Nadine Butts

Treasurer
U Mary SSS



Lori Larson

Past President
UND EoC

Congratulations to Lake Region State College, Minot State University, North Dakota State University, University of Mary, Turtle Mountain Community College, & University of North Dakota on successful Student Support Services grant awards!

We look forward to hosting ASPIRE in Fargo in 2026!

North Dakota TRIO Programs



Lake Region State College

Student Support Services

Minot State University

Student Support Services

North Dakota State University

Student Support Services & Upward Bound

Turtle Mountain Community College

Student Support Services

University of Mary

Student Support Services

University of North Dakota

Talent Search, Upward Bound, Educational Opportunity Center, Student Support Services, & McNair Scholars Program

Meet Your South Dakota ASPIRE Board



Carol Voss Ward

**President
University of South Dakota**



Ashley Kirchner

**Secretary/Treasurer
Black Hills State University**



Nathan Bylander

**President-Elect
South Dakota State University**

**Thank you to TRIO programs for serving over 2,700
of South Dakota's students!**

Increase One

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South Dakota TRIO Programs

Black Hills State University

Student Support Services

Dakota Wesleyan University

Student Support Services

Northern State University

McNair Scholars Program
Student Support Services
Upward Bound

Oglala Lakota College

Student Support Services

South Dakota State University

Student Support Services
Upward Bound

University of South Dakota

Student Support Services
Talent Search
Talent Search Sioux Falls
Upward Bound

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