

# Communicating Change



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As Tracie Curry sees it, she's just traded one desert for another.

"I have a love of desert landscapes, definitely," said the Los Angeles native, who is working on visualization efforts with EPSCoR's Northern Test Case. "Something about the Arctic being another kind of a desert – I just kind of wanted to be up there."

That being said, Curry took a circuitous route to the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where she's a Ph.D. student in Natural Resources and Sustainability (and a fellow in the Resilience and Adaptation Program) focused on using visual tools to communicate complex concepts. First came an undergraduate degree in Economics at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business, then three years in Washington D.C. as a financial analyst for a real estate advisory firm. But it wasn't Curry's element: "I just really hated being inside all the time, and in front of a computer, and in front of spreadsheets."

So she entered a Master's program in landscape architecture at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, where an instructor's offhand remark about the prospect of an ice-free Arctic sparked an interest in the changing North



Tracie Curry in Decision Theater North.

and its peoples. Since enrolling at UAF in 2014, Curry has been studying ways in which communication and collaboration can bolster the ability of communities to adapt to climate change. She's focusing on the coastal North Slope, looking at ways visual elements can improve interactions between researchers, agencies and residents.

"If you live in the Arctic and you're explaining your observations of change, it's difficult for somebody who is not from that area to really understand the magnitude of change, and the effect that it's having on you and your culture," she said. "But I think that there are some ways to do that visually."

Curry has been involved in multiple research projects. One is studying the human dimensions and cumulative effects of road development, including examining how communities, agencies, industry and academics interact to impact local adaptation. In another, she interviewed resi-

dents of the North Slope village of Wainwright to record their observations of change, part of an international project researching adaptation in coastal communities. She also undertook an EPSCoR-supported internship with Wainwright, where she created a database of existing research information about the village.

The first of these projects gave Curry a chance to flex her visualization skills, because she also worked on an EPSCoR award to translate the research into an interactive narrative, consisting of maps, infographics, animations, photo collage and narration. The idea was to frame the visual elements in an immersive multi-screen environment – in this case, the Decision Theater North visualization facility – to help audiences better grasp concepts like the magnitude and scale of change, to aid in their decision-making, and to expose them to a holistic, social-ecological systems approach to resource management.

All of these projects are helping Curry to develop her thesis, which will focus on both sides of research communications: how community members can better express the complexity of their culture and the impacts of change, and how agencies and researchers can better share technical information with policymakers and citizen groups.

