A PhD student at IARC, Douglas Cost studies interchanges between science and society, and how science can make people’s lives better. As he works to develop his own research and scholarship, Cost also benefits the IARC and UAF traditions of leading-edge science, especially in the areas of social science and education.

IARC’s Publications team interviewed Cost recently about his research, background, and interests.

What might interest people about your work?

My current research focuses on the idea of resilience, and the ways and reasons education is essential to developing resilient behaviors and sustainable, healthy lives. Specifically, how resilience (the ability to rebound from a catastrophic or traumatic change) transitions from an individual practice to a collective one can make an enormous difference in the survival of a community or population. By studying this process, I hope to develop educational strategies for use in rural Alaska schools, to foster stronger, healthier cycles of learning success.

Primarily, this work is part of the NSF-funded Northern Alaska Scenarios Project, designed to promote healthy, sustainable lives in Alaska’s Northwest Arctic and North Slope boroughs. For my part, I have worked to engage these communities’ young people and teachers, to profile their impressions of the public education system and the role it has played in building resilience. As an educator, I find these efforts consistently reaffirm both the sense of play and the potential that young people everywhere have in common, and that are so central to the idea of resilience. And because characteristics of resilience are important to so many elements of successful village life—from housing, justice, and education to the long standing Inupiat values at their core—these communities have also been generally receptive to the work of our research team.

Importantly, I also see this kind of project as a way of extending UAF’s reach, past the limitations of its own campus and Fairbanks and toward the many other areas of the state where our resources have the potential to make transformative, multi-generational change.

Have you always been interested in the concept of resilience?

Throughout my experience as a teacher—including settings as diverse as Compton, CA and Kotzebue, AK—resilience has seemed to me an operative measure for educators’ success. An educational system, in my view, can just as easily be a detractor to resilience as it can be a contributor, but by profiling our systems’ ability to nurture such characteristics in students, as well as those students’ greater capacities for building their own resilient “communities of practice,” we can empower those systems to change for the better.

Do you have other interests or pastimes aside from your research?

Lots. As an MFA in poetry, I’m always looking to engage creatively with words, art, and science (often at the same time). I also love spending time with my wife and two and a half year old son. I’m left to divide the rest of my fun time between yoga, softball, hiking, travel, and my classic VW Cabriolet (with which I count a drive to Honduras and back one of my proudest and most ridiculous achievements).