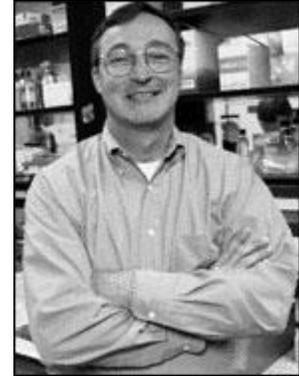


David R. Burgess

Job title: Biologist, Boston College

Can you tell us a little bit about your job?

I work in a sub-area of [cell biology](#) that deals with how cells change shape or form. I am particularly interested in what goes on in the cell's cytoskeleton, a structure much like our own skeleton, which is meant to support the cell and give it form.



Who helped influence your choice to have an interest or a career in STEM?

My father was a major influence on my early life. He was a Western [Cherokee](#) from Oklahoma who grew up living off and on with his grandmother, a medicine woman. When he was in his early teens, being the oldest, he left home due to the Great Depression and ended up in New Mexico. My father was in World War II, and in many ways my family owes a great deal to that war. Not only was it a great equalizer for minorities, but it also provided the G.I. Bill, which enabled my father to go to college in New Mexico. He became a high school mathematics and science teacher and a coach.

When I was ten years old we moved from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Santa Rosa, California. It was distinctly different in California, and the American Indian and Southwestern cultural presence was replaced by a very traditional Anglo-American culture. My father became a principal of a junior high school serving Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and African-Americans, and because of his commitment, life experiences and ability to relate to others, he became an honored educator. His commitment to serve others left a lasting imprint on my life. I am proud to be an American Indian scientist and love to work with students and others interested in science.

How did you start on your path to a career in STEM and what did that path look like?

I was not a great student, but my high school biology teacher, Mr. Rathman, really took an interest in me and made me feel like I could make it through. My performance in high school was okay, but not good enough to get me into the university. Since the university was too expensive anyway, I went to a community college instead.

I didn't do too well in college until I transferred to a four-year college, [California State Polytechnic College](#) (Cal Poly). Again, a great teacher took me under his wing and I was able to blossom as a student. At this time, I decided I wanted to become a scientist because I loved the study of cells.