

David Mogk lets his earthy interests and research lead his career path

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“Dull as a rock” has never described geologist David Mogk’s life.

“I was always interested in being outdoors and in science. There were two early influences that influenced me,” Mogk said. “One was that my parents would take me out to places around Michigan, like state parks and beaches. I would always pick up stones on the beach and put them in my pockets. The second thing is that I had a really good science teacher in Brownell who encouraged me.”

Mogk was a part of the first class to spend all four years at North. While here, he was in the accelerated math and science programs. Since there weren’t many diverse science classes at the time, Mogk did an independent study with biology teacher Jack Edwards his senior year. But Mogk wasn’t motivated to be a geologist until after graduation.

“Three days after I graduated from North, I traveled to Jackson Hole, and I took this field course in geology,” said Mogk. “Once I did that, I never looked back. I just found my calling and was a geology major at the University of Michigan. I just kept going.”

After his many successes at University of Michigan, Mogk went on to be the Program Director of Undergraduate Education at the National Science Foundation (NSF). He was responsible for reading and reviewing grants submitted by faculty around the country.

“The way the National Science Foundation works is, the faculty submits proposals to do work, like research,” Mogk said. “When faculty submits a proposal, my responsibility was to send it out to other faculty. I would take those recommendations and decide whether or not to fund the proposal.”

The NSF isn’t the only major science organization Mogk has worked with. Mogk has also worked with NASA. At NASA, Mogk worked with ancient rocks found in the mountains of Montana and also with moon rocks.

“NASA was great and exciting. One of the reasons was that I was there exactly at the time of the first shuttle launch,” Mogk said. “I was also working in the Johnson B. Center, right next to where the astronauts trained. It was really cool getting to see the



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“Some of the rocks we work on go back as far as 3.6 billion years ago. Our studies reveal that plate tectonics, is how the earth operates today, were operating as far back as 3.3- 3.5 billion years ago. That is pretty cool because you can figure that that is three-quarters of the earth’s history,” Geologist David Mogk said.

astronauts and all the things they needed to prepare for their mission. There were many other scientists there, and it is always something to ask questions and learn from.”

Apart from his work at these esteemed institutions, Mogk has made many other contributions to the geosciences.

“I have done a number of different things. My research is on how continents form and how they evolved with time,” Mogk said. “I have also taken a deep-sea research cruise with the Oceanographic Institute. But for almost 20 years now, I have been

very involved in science education. That is the second part of my career.”

Mogk has received many awards for his contributions. The most prestigious award that he has won was the Excellence in Geophysical Education Award.

“I won this award from the American Geophysical Union. This is an international group that has over 50,000 members, and I was the person that was awarded in that year,” Mogk said. “It was for contributions in Geoscience Education that had a global impact.”

Besides geology, Mogk enjoys running. He was a part of the North cross country team.

“We had a pretty good team. We weren’t state champions, but we always won league championships,” Mogk said. “The work ethic applied by Tom Gauerke (Mogk’s cross country coach) really had the most long-term impact. As a distance runner, we had to work hard and develop a passion for the sport. This kind of asset has turned over into my professional career, both as a researcher and a teacher.”

It wasn’t all smooth sailing, though. Mogk ran into some trouble due to colorblindness.

“Because I can’t rely on color, I have to look for evidence in other ways. Many of my students look at things and say that it is a given color, so it must be a particular mineral,” Mogk said. “Quite often that is incorrect. Color is important, but it is not the only thing.”

Because of how Mogk has helped to advance the area of geosciences, his dad, Bill Mogk, nominated him for the Distinguished Alumni award.

“I knew one of the recipients that won this award previously,” Bill Mogk said. “I felt that people should know about the wonderful things he does, too.”

Mogk shares some words of wisdom for kids who are struggling with school or who are unsure of their path.

“Be passionate. It is really important to get up every morning and have something in your life that you really have to do,” Mogk said. “To succeed, you have to be really passionate about what you do.”